

<sup>A</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
LETTER

TO A

FRIEND,

Concerning the

Great Sin

OF

*Taking GOD's Name in Vain.*

Whereto are added,

One or Two Remarks concern-  
*ing Vain or Common Swearing.*

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By EDWARD WELLS, D.D.  
Rector of Cotesbach in *Leicestershire.*

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LETTER

TO A

FRIEND

Containing the

Great Sin



Taking COPIES

One or Two REMARKS CONCERNING  
the VICE OF COMMON SWEARING.

By EDWARD WELLS, D.D.  
Rector of Cambridge in England.

LONDON: Printed by J. Sturges, at the  
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or at a Stationer, in the Strand.

The Love I owe to you is the same as the Love I owe to you

# A LETTER to a Friend, concerning the Great Sin of *Taking God's Name in Vain, &c.*

S I R

**T**HAT regard you already have for Virtue and Piety, makes me have a sincere Respect and Friendship for you. And I can't better express the Sincerity of my Friendship, than by being serviceable to you in a Matter of the greatest Concern; I mean, the promoting your Piety to a still higher, and yet but absolutely necessary Degree.

I gladly do you the Justice to say, that I have not observ'd you to be guilty of transgressing any one of the *Ten Commandments*, (taken in their large extent, or so as to comprehend under them the Whole of the Christian Religion) but this I say, moreover that, but in one respect, viz. *Taking the Name of God in Vain*, according to the more proper Interpretation of the Words, i. e. in mentioning the Name of GOD or LORD in Common Discourse, without any Need, or upon Trivial Occasions.

I am sorry I must say, that I have observ'd you, more than once, Faulty herein. At the first I mistook my own Ears, being willing to think the Fault lay rather in *them*, than in *you*. As soon as I was told, where the Fault truly lay, I could not but wonder, that you, in other respects, so well acquainted with the Honour due to GOD, should seem to put a Fringe of the Dishonouring GOD in this respect.

The Love I owe both to God and you, made me resolve to admonish you of this your great Sin, after such a manner as should be most likely to be effectual, and consequently to draw up this Paper, and communicate it to you.

To convince you then of the most fatal Mischief you expose your self to, by this sinful and unchristian Freedom, I need but apply to you the Argument us'd by St. James (Ch. 2, v. 10, 11.) *Whoever shall keep the Whole Law, as to other Points, and yet offend in one Point, He is esteemed in the Sight of God as Guilty of transgressing All the Law.* For he that said, *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me;* said also, *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.* Now, if thou hast no other God but the True God, yet if you take the Name of God in vain, thou art become, in the Sight of GOD, a Transgressor of the Law, i. e. in the meaning of St. James, such a Transgressor, as has no Right to Salvation by the Gospel, even until he has particularly repented of this Sin, and actually renounc'd and forsaken it. Add hereto that other Argument us'd by the same Apostle (Ch. 3, v. 11, 12) in a Case very near akin to yours, *Does a Fountain send forth at the same place both Water and Wine? Or a Vine figs? So can no Fountain both yield salt Water and fresh.*

Hence you may learn, Sir, that *Taking the Name of GOD in vain*, tho' it be the only sinful Freedom, I know you guilty of, yet is enough to mar all your other Acts of Religion and Piety, so to impeach them, as to render them Not acceptable to GOD, and consequently Not available to your Salvation. Which is so dreadful a Consideration, that, as I can't use a more Powerful one to convince you of your dangerous State, so I can't suppose you could ever have suffer'd your self to Take GOD's Name in vain, had this Consideration ever came into your Thoughts.

To tell you freely my Sentiments: I look upon it as a Master-piece of Satan, (that great Enemy to GOD)

Okry,

Glory and Man's Salvation) to be able to do  
things about, as that *Taking the Name of LORD or GOD*  
in vain should be so generally esteem'd, and that even  
by (otherwise) Good or Religious Persons, either no  
Offence at all, or of the *Evil* small Offence. For Char-  
ity obliges me to think, that such Persons could never  
at first have fallen into, much less have continu'd in  
such a Practice. Habitual Practice, had not this Noti-  
on obtain'd among them.

To unreceive you therefore, and others into whose  
Hands this Paper shall come, (it being Publish'd in  
order to be serviceable to put a stop to so pernicious  
or *Publick* a Sin.) let it be consider'd, 1. How very  
frequent this Person is taught in Scripture, that  
GOD'S Name is *Holy*, particularly *Psalms 111. 9. His*  
*Holy and Reverend is His Name.* His Name is *Holy*,  
i. e. Never to be us'd but on *Holy*, or Religious Oc-  
casions: His Name is *Reverend*, i. e. never to be us'd  
even on Holy Occasions, but with *Reverence*.

2. Let it be consider'd, that the contrary Practice  
is every Offence to GOD, as that He hath thought fit  
not only particularly and expressly to forbid it, but to  
make this Prohibition a distinct Command of the  
Decalogue. And it is Remarkable, that to prevent  
our being mistaken in the Meaning of the said Com-  
mand, as to the Point before us, *Taking of GOD'S*  
*Name in vain* is not barely imply'd under *Swearing*  
*in Vain*, as a lesser Sin under a greater, (as is so  
done in other Commands of the Decalogue) but *Tak-*  
*ing GOD'S Name in Vain* is the Sin expressly forbid in  
the Third Command, and *Swearing in Vain*, &c. com-  
prehended under it, as being one sort of *Taking GOD'S*  
*Name in Vain*.

3. Let it be consider'd, that *the Taking the Name*  
of GOD in vain is not only made an express and distinct  
Command of the Decalogue, but this Command is  
also peculiarly esteem'd with a severe Threat, expressly  
denounc'd against such as should transgress. *GOD*  
*will*



the LORD will not hold him Guilty, that taketh his Name in vain. Where the Exposition, The LORD will not hold him Guilty, sheweth, that GOD will not easily forgive this Sin, as only our General Repentance, or upon our daily begging Pardon for our Sins in general; but will require a Special and therefore either Confession or Daily Repentance for the same, as being a Sin of an High Nature.

4. Let it be consider'd, that the Commandment for Not taking is vain, or which is the same, for blaspheming the Name of GOD, is in the Decalogue as before the Command for *Hallowing the Sabbath*. It is therefore *Not hallowing the Sabbath* be a High Offence, a Great Sin; thus *Not hallowing the Name of GOD* must be so likewise, as being requir'd before the other. And I the rather take notice of this, because some Rigidly Scrupulous as to the *Hallowing of the Sabbath-day*, are far from being Scrupulous of *Taking GOD's Name in vain*.

5. Let it be consider'd, that the Duty of the Third Commandment is of so high an importance in the Sight of GOD; and consequently the Transgression of it, a Sin so High a Degree, that our blessed Saviour judg'd it in a special manner necessary to set his Followers right, as to the True Intent of the said Commandment. And therefore has given us in his Divine Sermon (*Mat. 5. 33. 37.*) an Exposition of this Commandment in particular. Wherein he informeth us (agreeably to what I have above observ'd in the 20. Commandment) that by the said Commandment, We are not only forbid to *Swear at all in vain*, or in Common Conversation; but are also injoyn'd to give Communication by *Yes, No, Nay, Yea*; i. e. Plain Affirmations or Negations, enforc'd (if need be) by being repeated: For whatsoever it were that thou, and consequently if thou hast mention of the Name of GOD or LORD, *swearst by GOD*; or as the last Words, should rather be render'd, *Cursed of the Lord God, i. e. of the Devil*, that Grand Enemy of the Honour and Glory of GOD.

Wise and lovely. Let it be consider'd, that in this most Excellent and Comprehensive Form of Prayer, which our Blessed Saviour has left us for our Daily Use, the very last Petition is this; *Hallowed be thy Name.* Whence is plainly denoted, that the *Hallowing* the Name of God is a Duty of the first Rank; and consequently the *Not Hallowing*, or *Taking in vain* the Name of God, must be a Sin of the first Rank.

The foregoing mention'd Considerations are, Sir, I think abundantly sufficient to Convince you, and any other, that the heathen *Taking the Name of GOD or LORD in vain*, is no small, but a very great Sin; an Act highly Offensive to Almighty GOD; And therefore that it is not without Just Cause that I thus Admonish you of the Infinite Danger, and most Dreadful Misery you are expos'd to, by being Guilty of Committing, Habitually Committing this Great Sin; untill you have obtain'd GOD's Pardon for it, by a Special, Solemn, and Practical Repentance; so as not only to be heartily sorry for what is past, but truly to renounce and forsake the said Sin for the future.

To make you further sensible, what need there is of a Special and Severe Repentance for what is past, be pleas'd to recollect, how very often you may have thus highly offended GOD by this Sin. Upon my own Observation I must tell you, that you have with-  
in half an Hour taken the Name of GOD or LORD in vain Three or Four times, to speak the least. And 'tis likely that you have us'd the same sinful Freedom elsewhere, and at other times, as oft as when I made the Observation; there being nothing, which could tempt you to the said Sin, at that time, any more than at any other. Now according to this Proportion consider, how often you have probably offended GOD in so high a manner every Day, especially when you have been engag'd in Company. And then consider further, how long, how many Years you have been guilty of using this sinful Freedom. From these two

last Considerations put together, you will be able to  
 make up pretty good Questions in the Number of Fines,  
 that you have provok'd GOD by this sinful Freedom;  
 and as you'll find the Number to be very Great, so it  
 will be but reasonable, that your Repentance should  
 bear a due Proportion, not only to the Magnitude of  
 the Sin in itself, but also to the Multitude of Times you  
 have committed it. To this end, I shall now  
 again, consider with you self, how many by your  
 Example may have been induc'd to use the same  
 Freedom, as judging it not sinful, because they have  
 heard you use it, whom they knew to be a Religious  
 Person. And this Consideration (not only of having  
 offended GOD your self by this Sin, but also of ha-  
 ving given ill Example to others, and thereby ether  
 led them into, or encourag'd them in the Commis-  
 sion of this Sin, will carry in it a new and weighty  
 Motive for enhancing the Degrees of your Repen-  
 tance; is to what is past.

As to the future, you must not only your self keep a  
 particular and strict Guard over your Words, and  
 hereto join your hearty and frequent Prayers, and de-  
 vout and frequent receiving of the Lords Supper, for  
 obtaining GOD's special Graces, or the more than ordi-  
 nary Assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable you to  
 cast off this sinful Habit, and quite to forsake the  
 Practice of this Sin; you must (I say) not only do  
 this your self, but it will be also very requisite  
 and beneficial for you to desire your Friends, with  
 whom you are wont to keep Company most, that  
 they would be so truly your Friends, as to watch you  
 likewise in your Discourse, and to give you faithful  
 Notice, if ever they hear you use the same sinful  
 Freedom; and also that they would pray to GOD  
 for you in a special manner, or to the best be-  
 forehand with him. You must also be diligent and  
 much as by Your Example you have likely been the  
 Unhappy Occasion, either of leading others into, or



He confirming them in, the use of this sinful Freedom; to you must for the future be *More than ordinary Zealots* to Promote the Honour of God, by endeavouring to reclaim such as you find guilty of Dishonouring GOD by the like sinful Freedom; and if your own Prudence does not suggest to you a better way, you may in order thereto communicate to them this Paper at least.

I can't think you can be so weak, as to seek for any shelter from that *Common*, but in reality *No Excuse*, viz. that when you take the Name of GOD or LORD in vain, you do it *Unawares* or *Unknown to your self*. For this is an Excuse, that may be alledg'd by the common Swearer, as well as by you; and therefore to be sure, carries nothing of Weight in it. Indeed it is so far from lessening, that it aggravates the Crime to an high Degree; it being certain, that a Person must be arriv'd to an *Habitual Practice* of a Sin before he can be guilty of Committing it *Unawares* or *Unknown to himself*. Nor is it any better Excuse, for any one to urge, that he fell into this sinful Freedom *he knows not how*, in his younger days, and by bearing it so familiarly us'd in almost all Conversation. For if this be a valid Excuse for a Christian, that takes GOD's Name in vain, it will also be as good an Excuse, if not much better, for a poor Idolatrous Heathen: Whereas St. Paul assures us, that such Heathen, in respect of their Idolatry, notwithstanding the common Usage of the Countries wherein they were born and Bred, are *without Excuse*, Rom. I. 20. And in like manner, whosoever, amongst us Christians, is guilty of taking the Name of God in vain, is in reality *without Excuse* in the sight of GOD, notwithstanding the common Practice of this Sin amongst Persons of all Ranks and Orders; forasmuch as GOD has so plainly reveal'd to us our Duty in this respect. Indeed hereupon I can't forbear observing again, that it is an amazing Consideration, a most wonderful Artifice of the Devil, so to bring things about,

about, that Persons otherwise Religious, and who particularly abhor Swearing and Cursing, &c. and actually abstain from them, should yet fall into, and live in, the sinful Freedom of *taking the Name of GOD or LORD in vain*; notwithstanding they have the contrary Duty so frequently inculcated in the Scriptures, have the *Ten Commandments*, in particular read to them at least once every Week, and both hear and say themselves the *LORD's Prayer* several times every Day.

I might here put an end to this Letter, with regard, Sir, to you for whose sake it was Principally wrote. But it may be useful in respect of Others to observe further, that by *Taking GOD's Name in vain* is to be understood, not only saying in Common Discourse and without Need these Words, *O God, O Lord, O Jesu, O Christ, Good God, Good Lord*, or the like; but also using these Expressions, *God bless you, God-bless you, God love you, God or Christ bless your Soul*, and the like. For tho' these Expressions are Good in themselves, yet they are not to be us'd but in a Religious Manner. They are so many *short Prayers*, and therefore are to be us'd Reverently and Devoutly, and upon proper and serious Occasions: Whenever they are not so us'd, they are *Abused* after a sinful manner. To cry *God bless you, do this or that* fill up perhaps wicked thing; what is it but to *Take GOD's Name in Vain*, and to affront him in an high Degree. In a word, as to pray to GOD for a Blessing on another in a Serious and Reverent manner, is a great Act of Piety; so to cry, *God bless you*, (or the like) in a laughing, jesting, or otherwise irreverent manner, is a Great Act of Impiety.

It will also be useful to observe, that not only using these Expressions, *By God, By Jesu, By Christ, By the Lord*, &c. is Swearing, but also to say, *GOD knows*. For what is this but to *Appeal to the Knowledge of GOD* for the Truth of what we say. And therefore if what

are speaking of, be only a Trifle, a Matter of no  
 much Importance, as requires such an Appeal to the  
 knowledge of GOD; then to cry, GOD knows, is not  
 only to Take GOD's Name in vain, but to Swear  
 in vain. And I take notice of this, because I have  
 seen some not only to profess an Abhorrence of  
 Oaths or vain Swearing, but actually to abstain  
 from what they take to be so; and yet to make no  
 scruple of using familiarly, and upon any trifling occa-  
 sion, this Expression, GOD knows. In like manner  
 say, GOD, or LORD, shall do so or so, or the like;  
 not barely Taking GOD's Name in vain, but Swearing  
 in vain. For GOD or LORD, in such Expressions,  
 signifies as much as, By GOD, or By the LORD. And  
 I think also, that the Expression, GOD so, most fa-  
 miliarly us'd by some, is in reality no other than Swearing  
 in vain. For what else is GOD so, but a Contracted  
 Oath, By GOD is it so, or say yes, or no. And  
 this puts me in mind of taking notice here of  
 the contracted Forms of Swearing, that are us'd  
 among us, as if there was no manner of Hurt or Evil in  
 them. And such are these, *Od* or *Ad*, that is in short,  
 By God; *Od's Bud* or *'s Bud*, that is short, By God's  
 blood; *Od's Wounds* or *'s Wounds*, that is, By God's  
 wounds; *Od's Life* or *'s Life*, that is, By God's Life;  
*Od's Zookers* or *'s Zookers*, that is, By God's Succours;  
*Od's Semmes*, that is, As God sees me; *Od's Me*, that  
 is, As God is with me, &c. Now these being no  
 other than Oaths or Forms of Swearing thus contract-  
 ed, the same Command, that enjoyns us not to use  
 the Explicit Forms, or the Words at length, does  
 so by consequence require us not to use the Contracted  
 Forms, or the Words shortened; forasmuch as the  
 Words are of the same Importance in both Cases.  
 And therefore such as use any of the said Contracted  
 Forms, (Need not add in Common Discourse, because  
 they are never us'd otherwise) may justly be look'd upon  
 as ought to look on themselves, as guilty of Swearing.

And the like is to be said concerning  
such as use the Expression, O Lord, for hereby they do in reality take the Name of  
the LORD in vain, and so commit the same Sin.

I shall conclude with observing, that the Sin of  
Taking the Name of GOD in vain, as also of Swearing in  
vain, have some Aggravations Peculiar to them, above  
other Sins; forasmuch as there is no Temptation to  
these Sins, arising either from any Circumstances, they  
yield to any one of our Senses within us, or from  
any Beauty or Force which they add without  
anything that is said by us, and which at least  
might not be added by discreet Expressions.  
So likewise to Swear in vain, or to take the Name  
of GOD or LORD in vain, is to Sin, only for sinning  
sake, and so these are Sins more peculiarly of a De-  
vilish Nature, and therefore are justly said by Truth  
itself, Our Blessed Redeemer, to be Sins that in a more  
Immediate manner come of the Evil One, i. e. the  
Devil.

If this Letter shall (as it ought) become Instrumen-  
tal in convicting you, Sir, and others that Read it,  
of the great Heinousness of these Sins, and so bring  
you duly to Fear this Glorious and Fearful Name, the  
LORD thy GOD (Deut. 28. 38.) I shall fully attain  
my End in Penning it, and by way of Return shall on-  
ly desire a Place in your Prayers.

April 10th

1710



Your Most Affectionate and

Faithful Servant in Christ,

EDW. WELLS.

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